



I looked up to see how L was getting on. *Odyssey* 13–24 was lying face down on the bench; L was nowhere to be seen. I couldn't remember when I had seen him last. I thought of going to look for him, but then this would mean leaving the one place he knew to look for me.

I looked at the *Odyssey* to see how far he had got. My chances of not teaching him Japanese did not look good. I began leafing idly through *White Fang*.

After a while I heard a voice I knew.

Would you like to hear me count to a thousand in Arabic? said the voice.

I thought you said your mum was in Room 61?

She is.

Then we'll have to leave it for another time.

When?

Some other time. Is this your little boy?

A security guard was standing in front of me, as was L.

I said: Yes.

L said: I went to the toilet all by myself.

I said: Good for you.

Guard: You'll never guess where I found him.

I: Where did you find him?

Guard: You'll never guess in a million years.

I: Where?

Guard: All the way down in the basement in one of the restoring rooms. Seems he must have nipped down the stairs and gone through one of the staff doors.

I: Oh.

Guard: No harm done, but you ought to keep a closer eye on him.

I: Well, there's no harm done.

Guard: No, but you ought to keep a closer eye on him.

I: Well, I'll bear that in mind.

Guard: What's his name?

I wish people wouldn't ask that kind of question.

When I was pregnant I kept thinking of appealing names such as Hasdrubal and Isombard Kingdom and Thelonius, and Rabindranath, and Darius Xerxes (Darius X.) and Amédée and Fabius Cunctator. Hasdrubal was the brother of Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who crossed the Alps with elephants in the 3rd century BC to wage war with Rome; Isambard Kingdom Brunel was a 19th-century British engineer of genius; Thelonius Monk was a jazz pianist of genius; Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali polymath; Darius was a Persian king, as was Xerxes; Amédée is the first name of the narrator's grandfather in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and Fabius Cunctator was the Roman general who saved the Roman state from Hannibal by delaying. They all had names one should really not give to a child, and once he was born I had to think fast.

I thought that ideally it should be a name which could work whether he was serious and reserved or butch, a name like Stephen which could be Steve or David which could be Dave. The problem was that I liked David better than Stephen, and Steve better than Dave, and I couldn't get round it by calling him Stephen David or David Stephen because a series of two trochees with a v in the middle would sound ridiculous. I couldn't call him David and Steve for short; that would be quaint. People kept coming up to the bed saying what's his name, and I would say, Well, I was thinking of Stephen, or I was thinking about David, and on one occasion it turned out the person was a nurse with a form who wrote down whatever it was I was thinking about and took it away again and that was that.

They did give me the birth certificate when I left and it was one or the other. When I got home it was obvious that his name was ac-

tually Ludovic so I called him that having really no choice in the matter.

I now replied evasively: I call him Ludo.

Guard: Well, keep an eye on Ludo in future.

I: Well, thank you for your help. I think we'll just go to Room 34 and look at the Turners if you don't mind. Thank you again for your help.

It was much easier when he was small. I had one of those Kanga carriers; in warm weather I would type at home with him in front and in cold weather I would go to the British Museum and sit in the Egyptian gallery near the changing room, reading *Al Hayah* to keep my hand in. Then at night I would go home and type *Pig Fancier's Monthly* or *Weaseller's Companion*. And now four years have gone by.

1 March, 1993

19 days to my birthday.

I am reading Call of the Wild again. I don't like it as well as White Fang but I have just finished White Fang again.

I am up to Odyssey 19.322. I have stopped making cards for all the words because there would be too much to carry around but I just make cards for words that look useful. Today we went to the museum and they have a picture of the Odyssey, it is supposed to show the Cyclops but you can't actually see him. It is called Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus. Ulysses is the Latin name for Odysseus. There was a card on the wall saying you can see Polyphemus on the mountain but you can't. I told the guard they should change it and he said it was not up to him. I asked who it was up to and he said maybe the head of the gallery. I tried to get Sibylla to take me to see the head but she said he was too busy and it would be more polite to write him a letter, she said I could write him a letter and practise my handwriting. I said why don't you write a letter. She said he had probably never had a letter from a five-year-old before, if I wrote a letter and signed it Ludo Aged Five he would pay attention to it. I think this is stupid because anybody could sign a letter Aged Five. Sibylla said true, one look at your handwriting and he won't believe you're a day over two. She seemed to think this was hysterically funny.

2 March, 1993

18 days to my birthday. I have been on the planet 5 years and 348 days.

3 March, 1993

17 days to my birthday. We rode the Circle Line today because we couldn't go back to any museums. It was tedious in the extreme. One funny thing that happened is that a lady got into an argument with Sibylla about two men who were about to be flayed alive. Sibylla explained that one of the men dies of heart failure at time t and the other at time $t + n$ after having someone peel off his skin with a knife for n seconds and the lady said *pas dev* and Sibylla said I should warn you that he speaks French. Then the lady said *non um non avanty il ragatso* and Sibylla said not forward the boy. Not forward the boy. Not. Forward. The boy. Hmmm. I'm afraid I don't quite understand, you clearly have a command of Italian idiom which I cannot match and the lady said she thought it was not a suitable subject for discussion in the presence of a small child and Sibylla said oh I see, and that's how you say it in Italian. *Non avanty il ragatso*. I must remember that. The lady said what kind of example do you think you are setting and Sibylla said would you mind if we continued this discussion in Italian, I feel that it is not a suitable subject for discussion in the presence of a small child or as they say in Italian *non avanty il ragatso*. After she got off the train Sibylla said she should not really have been so rude because we should be polite to people however provoking and I should not follow her example but learn to keep my inevitable reflections to myself. She said it was only because she was a bit tired because she had not been getting much sleep and otherwise she would never have been so rude. I am not so sure but I kept my inevitable reflections to myself.

We Never Go Anywhere

